

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 SANTO DOMINGO 005395

SIPDIS

TOFAS 42

FOR STATE DEPARTMENT
USDA FOR PATRICIA SHEIKH
AMS FOR KEN CLAYTON
AMS JARED BURNETT
USDA/FAA/WH AREA DIRECTOR, JBAILEY

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EAGR DR](#)

SUBJECT: LETTER FROM MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE AMILCAR ROMERO ON DOMINICAN REPUBLIC AVOCADO ISSUE

11. SUMMARY: ON JULY 26, 2005, ACTING AGRICULTURAL COUNSELOR PAUL HOFFMAN AND SENIOR AGRICULTURAL SPECIALIST CARLOS SUAREZ MET WITH THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE OF THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, AMILCAR ROMERO, TO DISCUSS ONGOING CONCERNS ABOUT AVOCADOS AND THE DOMINICAN REQUEST TO "OPEN THE WINDOW" FOR EXPORTS OF THE SEMIL VARIETY TO THE UNITED STATES, AT A MINIMUM, A WEEK EARLIER. SPECIFICALLY, HIS OFFICE WAS CONCERNED ABOUT THE ENTRY DATE OF THE SEMIL 34 VARIETY BEING CHANGED FROM OCTOBER 11 TO OCTOBER 17 IN MY 2005/6. THE SEMIL 34 VARIETY REPRESENTS ABOUT 70 PERCENT OF THE DOMINICAN GREEN SKIN AVOCADO EXPORTS TO THE UNITED STATES. THIS ISSUE HAS GENERATED CONSIDERABLE NEGATIVE PRESS COVERAGE, PARTICULARLY WITH RESPECT TO THE DR/CAFTA AGREEMENT. ACTION REQUEST IN PARAGRAPH 4.
12. ON OCTOBER 5, 2005, THE FAS OFFICE IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC RECEIVED A LETTER FROM MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE AMILCAR ROMERO, DIRECTED TO SECRETARY JOHANNIS ADDRESSING THE AVOCADO ISSUE AGAIN. TRANSLATION OF THE LETTER FOLLOWS IN PARAGRAPH 5.
13. AVOCADO PRODUCTION IN THE UNITED STATES IS VALUED OVER US\$350 MILLION DOLLARS. MOST OF THE PRODUCTION IS IN CALIFORNIA AND APPROXIMATELY FIVE PERCENT IS PRODUCED IN FLORIDA. ACCORDING TO DOC DATA, US AVOCADO IMPORTS TOTALED \$158 MILLION IN CY2004. U.S. IMPORTS FROM THE DR TOTALED US\$16 MILLION (TEN PERCENT) IN THE SAME YEAR. IF WE ALLOWED AN EARLIER ENTRY, IMPORTS WOULD INCREASE AN ESTIMATED .6 MILLION DOLLARS (LESS THAN ONE PERCENT). THE U.S. EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT THE GOOD WILL GENERATED BY OUR CONCESSION WOULD BE EXTREMELY HELPFUL IN THE ACCEPTANCE OF DR-CAFTA IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC.
14. ACTION REQUEST: PLEASE PROVIDE TALKING POINTS AND TEXT TO RESPOND TO SECRETARY ROMERO'S REQUEST TO SECRETARY JOHANNIS. ANY ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE WOULD BE WELCOMED.
15. UNOFFICIAL TRANSLATION OF LETTER FROM DOMINICAN MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE TO SECRETARY JOHANNIS.

Distinguished Mr. Secretary:

We are pleased to address you and also express to you, as the Head of this Department, our concern due to the situation that has arisen as a result of Agricultural Marketing Order OM915, issued by the United States Department of Agriculture, which regulates the entry of avocados of the Semil 34 variety into United States and Puerto Rican territories, significantly affecting the producers of avocados in the Dominican Republic.

We had hoped to meet with you at the recent Ministerial Meeting on "Agriculture and Rural Life in the Americas", held in Guayaquil, where the Director General of the Interamerican Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) was reelected. On that occasion we would have personally discussed with you this issue of great interest to the Dominican agriculture sector; however, unfortunately you could not attend.

Upon suggestion from deputy undersecretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs, Mr. James Butler, with whom we had the opportunity to have breakfast in Guayaquil, we have decided to draw your attention to the difficulties that the avocado producers of our country are facing with regard to the marketing of their products in American territories.

This Ministry of Agriculture, has addressed the United States Ambassador to our country on two

occasions as well as other officials from the United States Department of Agriculture, to state our concern in light of the above-mentioned Agricultural Marketing Order and to request that the same be reconsidered, because although the same has been amended under "Formal rule-making", we believe that there is room for some flexibility, without affecting the availability of fresh quality ripe fruits that are suitable for the United States consumer, during seasons when there is very little internal demand.

We are aware that you, as United States Secretary of Agriculture, represent and endorse the OM915; however, we also know that the group of Dominican producers that has traditionally exported Semil 34 avocados to the United States fills a consumer need, because said variety is not produced commercially in Florida. Furthermore, Florida producers contribute only 5% of the United States' avocado production.

On the other hand, we would like to point out that the above-mentioned Marketing Order becomes ever more complex and demanding for our export products, which together with our condition as a small country that depends on exports to strengthen its economy worsens the above-mentioned situation.

In light of the above, we would like to request that you consider the possibility of establishing September 17 as the date of entry of Semil 34 avocados (green skin) from the Dominican Republic into United States territory, thus creating a more appropriate balance of the OM915, at least with regard to its seasonal access scheme for imported products.

Our request is based on Article 915.53 of said Order (Exemption Certificates), which states that when an individual demonstrates with proof that a variety of avocado has reached its ripeness point before the date established for its commercialization, the Committee may then adopt, with the approval of the Secretary of Agriculture, the procedural rules aimed at commercializing said avocados.

In this regard, we ask that you take into account that our country has always maintained good agricultural trade relations with the United States, relations that have traditionally united both nations.

We would like to take advantage of this opportunity to express our profound sorrow and consternation due to the tragedy that has occurred in the State of Louisiana, which has filled our nation with sadness.

We would like to express our gratitude in advance for your attention in response to this exposition, and at the same time convey to you our great esteem and respect.

Sincerely yours,
Amilcar Romero P.
Minister of Agriculture

HERTELL